

ADVERSE RELINQUISHMENT & ADOPTION EXPERIENCES (ARAEs) ASSESSMENT PROJECT



Marie Dolfi, LCSW

mdolfilcsw@gmail.com www.adoptioncounselingny.com

(518) 281-8884

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The Adverse Relinquishment & Adoption Experiences (ARAEs) assessment project is an endeavor by Marie Dolfi, LCSW to develop a comprehensive assessment tool which lists adverse relinquishment and adoption experiences experienced by adoption triad members. The field of adoption acknowledges that life experiences impact adoption triad members, but the trauma of relinquishment and adoptive life experiences has not been delineated in a comprehensive assessment tool. For an experience to be included on the ARAEs assessment, the experience needs to be a: *Stressful or traumatic life event that preceded an adoption or occurred after an adoption finalization that has a negative and long-lasting impact on an individual's health, self-esteem &/or behavior.* With adoption only occurring because of changes in the family system and the involvement of professionals, the ARAEs assessment takes into consideration the systems adoption triad members interact over their lifetime. An ecological systems model provides an ideal framework to look at adverse relinquishment and adoption experiences because it acknowledges the impact of the extended family, communities, adoption professionals, services, and adoption laws/policies on triad members. The advantage of an adverse relinquishment and adoption experience assessment is that it broadens an assessment from the simplicity of "is it an adoption issue" to a comprehensive look as to the reality of the number of ARAEs experienced by an adoption triad member over their life time as well as an opportunity to look at an individual's ecological system to assess the best places for support and intervention.

The adverse relinquishment and adoption experiences listed in the ARAEs assessment were compiled from a review of adoption literature (research, biographical & autobiographical), professionals sharing on clinical cases, and individuals accounts shared by adoption triad members. As of March 15, 2018 the ARAEs assessment includes:

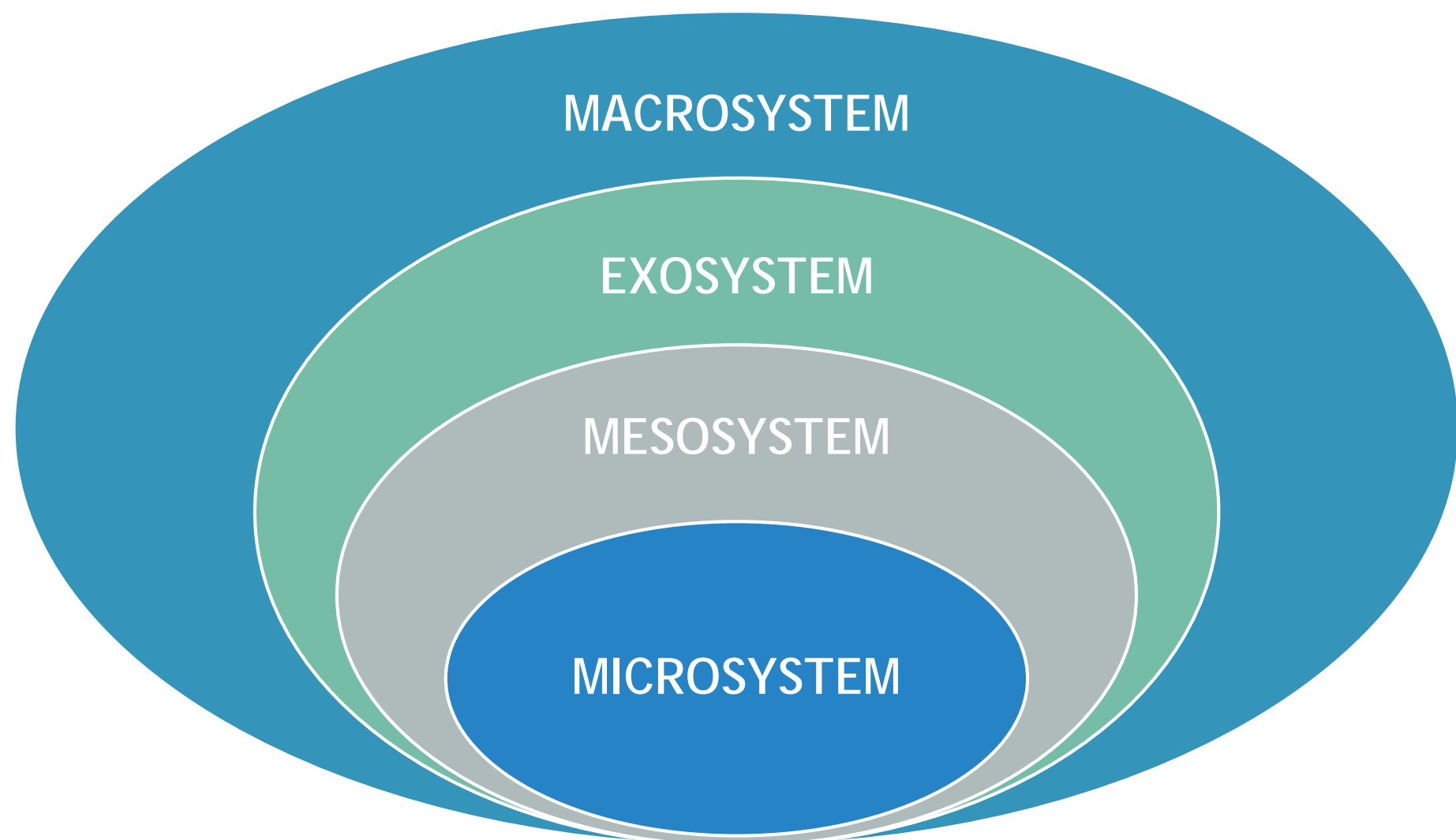
- 42 Adverse Relinquishment & Adoption Experiences for birth/first parents
- 57 Adverse Relinquishment & Adoption Experiences for adopted individuals
- 24 Adverse Relinquishment and Adoption Experiences for adoptive parents

While the ARAEs assessment does not include adverse relinquishment and adoption experiences that have impacted triad member's extended families due to a need to limit the scope of this endeavor, the author acknowledges that extended family members/ adoption constellation members also experience adverse relinquishment and adoption experiences.

FUTURE STEPS

The current phase of the project is interviewing adoption triad members on their adverse life experiences to "fine tune" the list. Adoption triad members and professionals interested in reviewing the complete ARAEs list to help improve the comprehensiveness of the list should contact Marie Dolfi to share their experiences and knowledge. The second phase will be the development of a draft self-administered ARAEs assessment that would provide an individual an opportunity to rank the severity of the adverse life experience and what age range the adverse experience happened.

ECOLOGICAL SYSTEMS



Ecological Systems Paradigm is a concept delineated by Urie Bronfenbrenner¹ who emphasized a person's development is impacted not only by the systems that an individual interacts with but with the systems their family members interact with and as well as the impact of the greater society.

Microsystem: A pattern of activities, roles and interpersonal relationships experienced by a person in their home.

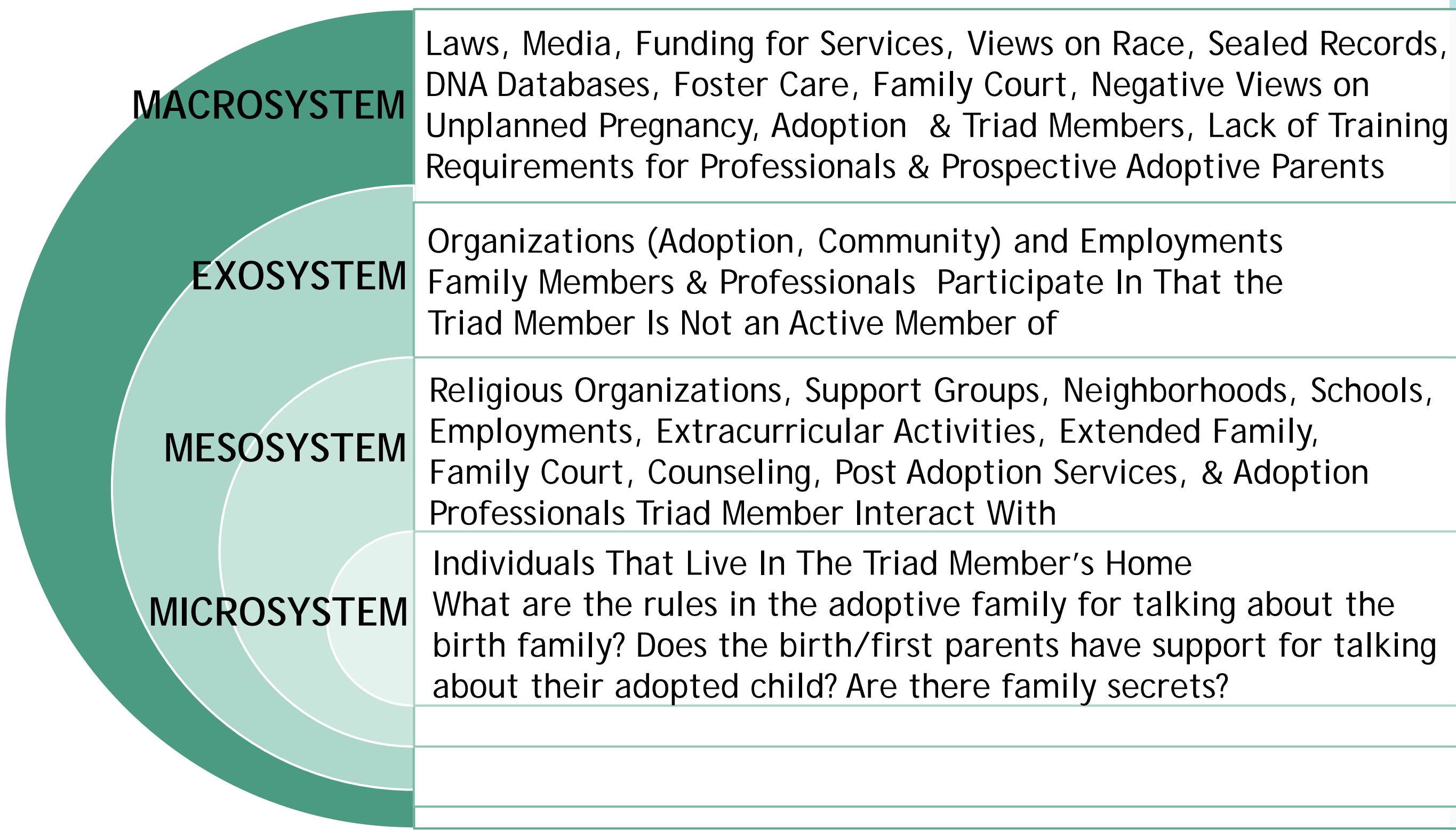
Mesosystem: The interrelations among two or more setting in which an individual actively participates in (i.e. home, school, neighborhood, peers, employment, support groups, religious organization, extracurricular activities)

Exosystem: One or more settings that an individual does not directly participate in that has an impact on them. (i.e. adoptive parent at a training program, adoption professional's training, organizations birth parent's family are involved in)

Macrosystem: Culture, laws, values, belief systems

Chronosystem: The cumulative experiences of all 4 systems over a lifetime on an individual. Adoption is not a one time event, it is a lifelong journey that impacts birth/first parents, adopted persons, adoptive parents & their extended families throughout the course of their lives.

ECOLOGICAL SYSTEMS IMPACTING RELINQUISHMENT & ADOPTION



An adverse relinquishment and adoption assessment includes a review of the impact of multiple systems on triad members over their life time.

ADVERSE RELINQUISHMENT & ADOPTION EXPERIENCES

Due to space limitations, the below lists are abbreviated lists of ARAEs for adoption triad members.

BIRTH/FIRST PARENT ARAEs

- Relinquishing their child to adoption (involuntary & voluntary)
- No knowledge of how child is doing after surrender
- Coerced to relinquish by family and significant others
- Groomed to relinquish by adoption professionals
- Declared unfit to parent by family court
- Forced to leave school or employment due to pregnancy
- Sent away to maternity home or other location
- Being shamed by family, friends &/or professionals for having an untimely pregnancy
- Family members act "as if" relinquishment & child never happened
- Child relinquished is a secret from family members & significant others
- Lack of support & services for trauma of relinquishment & PTSD
- Birth father learned about child after adoption was finalized
- Open relationship closed by adoptive parents
- Reunion relationship with adult child difficult or unsatisfactory

ADOPTED INDIVIDUAL ARAEs

- Abandoned as a child
- Lived in an orphanage
- Spent time in foster care
- Relinquishment from first family
- Loss or relationships with family, friends, community, country, language
- Raised by adoptive parents "as if" born into family
- Rejection by adoption parents due to poor family fit or wanting to talk about adoption & birth family
- Genealogical bewilderment due to lack of information
- Lack of genetic mirroring negatively impacting identity
- Open adoption relationship that was closed by birth parent
- Being a person of color with white adoptive parents and a lack of relationships with individuals of their race/ethnicity
- Reunion relationship with birth parents that is difficult or unsatisfactory
- Late discovery adopted person

ADOPTIVE PARENT ARAEs

- Unresolved loss of infertility, miscarriages, still births that impact relationship with adopted child
- Difficulty attaching to child due to differences in personality or temperament
- Parenting a child with significant mental health issues caused by early life experiences (i.e. fetal alcohol exposure, abuse or neglect)
- Birth parent does not acknowledge adoptive parent as child's parent and tries to sabotage relationship with child
- Parenting a child with mental health issues and no post adoption services available
- Parenting a child with developmental trauma that rejects care and love
- Child rejects adoptive parents and wants to return to birth family
- Rejected by extended family for adopting a child with special needs
- Secondary trauma experienced by parent due to hearing trauma stories from their child

¹ Bronfenbrenner, Urie, *The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature & Design*, Harvard University Press, 1979, Harvard MA